

New Generation of Inventive Food and Fun

BY RYAN NEWHOUSE

he secret to the Roanoke Valley's success can be summed up in one word: creativity. Through music, art, architecture and cuisine, a variety of venues, people and programs are redefining what it means to be a Roanoke Valley resident. This creative renaissance is driven by new voices constantly bringing vibrancy and fresh ideas that change the way residents live, learn, work and play.

National and international musical acts such as singer-songwriter Elton John and family-friendly Disney Live performances take stage at the civic centers in the cities of Salem and Roanoke. Built to host a wide variety of sporting events, as well, the complexes also see a rotation of country music stars.

"Everybody who has been selling records on the country charts over the past few years has now been through the civic centers," says Tad Dickens, music critic for the *Roanoke* *Times.* Part of the draw for these acts is that valley destinations fall along Interstate 81, the path that country performers travel between Nashville, Tenn., and New York, N.Y.

For local and regional acts, however, it's spots like Martin's Downtown Bar and Grill, Growler's American Grill, the Venue, Blue 5, 202 Market, and Kirk Avenue Music Hall that allow area musicians to showcase their talent and make a name for themselves.

Martin's, voted by readers of *The Roanoker* magazine as one of the best places in the city to see live music, seats around 200 people. Famous for its ribs and half-price hamburger Mondays, Martin's is also a major sponsor of the Down by Downtown (DxDT) festival, a four-day event in April when more than 50 bands converge on the city's downtown. The festival is now in its third year.

Kirk Avenue Music Hall, which was founded by real estate developer, entrepreneur and Roanoke native Ed Walker and his wife Katherine, is a small venue dedicated to presenting musical events in a relaxed, smoke-free setting. With seating for about 140 people, a concertgoer won't find a TV or a menu at the music hall only a stage offering audiences a great view and clear sound. A popular Roanoke band, The Bastards of Fate, chose the hall for its debut release concert of the album, "Who's a Fuzzy Buddy?"

Growler's, formerly Awful



Intimate shows and indie acts are standard fare at Kirk Avenue Music Hall.



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The Zac Brown Band's show at the Salem Fair lights up the night.

Arthur's Towers, seats nearly 450 people for its music events. With a blend of traditional American and Southern fare combined with local and regional music, Growler's completes the trifecta of hotspots for area music lovers.

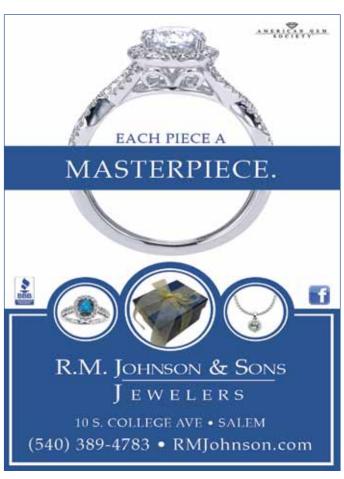
"Five years ago you wouldn't have had a scene that is as vital as this one is right now," says Dickens. "The people that are running all these spots have all stepped up into positions

Live entertainment fans can find everything from intimate recital spaces to a gloriously refurbished concert hall—all in one place. Performers like Alison Krauss and James Taylor grace the stage of the Shaftman Performance Hall at the Jefferson Center, a castle-like edifice that once housed the



Music is a way of life in the Greater Roanoke Valley.

in the last five years that allow them to bring in good live music. These people are Jason Martin of Martin's, Barry Caldwell of Growler's, and Gary Jackson, who was hired... to book for Kirk Avenue."



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A moment of calm before the crowd arrives at the Salem Civic Center.

area's largest high school. The site is currently staging its 10th anniversary season, with acts like singer Angelique Kidjo and the Virginia Ballet. Opera Roanoke's 2012 schedule included performances of "Carmen" and "Il Trovatore" at the Jefferson Center.

The Roanoke Civic Center's Broadway Series will feature such theatrical hits as "Shrek the Musical," "A Chorus Line" and "Dreamgirls." The Roanoke Symphony Orchestra paid tribute to the music of Freddie Mercury with its performance of "The Music of Queen."

In an effort to foster the musical creativity of Roanoke youth, the Jefferson Center also offers an after-school program called the Music Lab for students in middle and high school. It not only teaches kids about music, music theory and instrumentation, but also about the technological side of

Budding virtuosos in the Patrick Henry High School orchestra.



The founding members of Wilson Fairchild grew up just a few miles away from Roanoke.

recording and performing.

Another area resident who is fostering the dreams of budding musicians is David Lipps, the orchestra director at Patrick Henry High School. A group of 76 students traveled with Lipps to New York, to play at Carnegie Hall in March 2012.

"This Carnegie Hall event will make people look and say this must be a good place to go if you are a musician," says Lipps, who has overseen explosive growth in the Patrick Henry High orchestra program. When he took over five years ago, the orchestra averaged 10-15 members. It is currently 90 players strong.

Lipps and others recognize that in order to

have a strong high school music program, there must be strong feeder programs in the area middle and elementary schools. Such plans are now being developed at Woodrow Wilson and James Madison middle schools.

"These kids can now see far into the future," says Lipps, "knowing that when they start playing that violin, viola, cello or string bass that they will always be offered a place to play in the [Roanoke City Public Schools]."

With events like DxDT and venues like Martin's and Growler's, it's evident that music and food go hand in hand for valley residents. It signifies area residents'

appreciation of the finer things in life, an appreciation they can heartily indulge in the numerous eateries that line the streets of its cities and towns.

"Alejandro's in downtown Roanoke is a wildly popular taqueria-style Mexican restaurant that is very casual and is usually packed during weekday lunches and weekend dinners," says Lindsey Nair, a Roanoke Times feature writer and food critic. Alejandro's has been voted both "Best Mexican Food in Town" and as having the "Best Margaritas" by readers of *The Roanoker*.

"Carlos' Brazilian International Cuisine has been around for ages and is a







Crowds thrill at the showmanship of country star Jason Aldean.



Local eateries whip up tantalizing treats.

good example of diversity of cuisine," says Nair, "and it has an incredible view from its restaurant." Carlos' has won numerous accolades from locals (also in *The Roanoker's* annual contest), including "Best Chef," "Best Dessert,"

"Best Service," and is a consistent winner of "Best Restaurant Overall."

"The Metro! Restaurant and Lounge offers metropolitan décor and serves a variety of different foods, including sushi," says Nair.

Fine dining is additionally available throughout the region at restaurants such as Pomegranate in Troutville, the Dogwood Restaurant in Vinton and the Farmhouse Restaurant in Christiansburg.

The Blue Apron in Salem serves carefully prepared cuisine in a beautifully renovated setting

making it a destination for an evening out or a special business lunch.

All of the valley's creative outlets—whether they are just beginning, beginning to gain notice or are well established—are testaments to how community innovators can together foster a deep appreciation for creativity, be it one note, one song or one dish at a time.